

Governor's Proposed FY23 Budget Adjustments
Appropriations Hearing
HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Thursday, February 24th, 2022

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Clinical Social Worker & Columbus House Board Vice Chair
Columbus House

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan, Representative Nolan, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for reading my testimony today on HB 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023. I am writing in defense of the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is **Christina Lindstrom**, and I work in **Orange** and am a resident of **Branford**, CT.

I am a clinical social worker and the Columbus House Board Vice Chair. I have volunteered with Columbus House since 2015 and have been involved with social services since my time in AmeriCorps in 2006. I see two main keys to ending homelessness: 1) access to safe, affordable housing 2) funding and supporting our staff.

I am also a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut and think that their legislative priorities provide a clear map toward ending homelessness that we can all rally together around as a state. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents was made even more important.

We respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

- We support the preservation of DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.404 million;
- We support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance long term plan to restore at least \$461 million to community nonprofits, which includes housing and homeless service organizations funded by DMHAS;
- We support an additional \$13.34 million in FY 23 (*including \$5.26 million increase in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line, and \$8.08 million at DOH*) to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and professional development for front line workers, increasing rent and utility costs, and better access to technology;
- We support the Governor's proposed use of \$2.8 million of ARPA (\$1.1m FY23; \$1.1m FY24; \$562,000 FY25) for wrap-around services for 150 units of supportive housing. Supportive services are an **ongoing need and require a permanent investment**, and as such we are asking Appropriations to **support an increase** in DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line of \$2.25 million in FY23 to expand supportive services to 300 scattered

site and development units for highly vulnerable individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability

Homelessness is solvable. Connecticut can make homelessness a rare, brief and one-time experience by investing in what works: housing, supportive services, and the people and infrastructure that support our most vulnerable residents.

As a social worker, I've helped clients navigate the experience of homelessness. It is challenging, grueling, stigmatizing, and overwhelming. I have worked hand in hand with Columbus House staff to move people along the continuum of housing from emergency shelter to transitional housing, to finally permanent housing. This continuum of support is so necessary and the coordination we do in the state is an integral part of this process, but we lack access to affordable and safe housing. It is a constant struggle to not only find apartments that clients can afford, but ones that are also safe, and that our client's will be approved for. We all know this is an incredibly complex issue, however, with the funding and budget items outlined above, we believe we have a solid starting point for Connecticut to reasonably work towards ending homelessness.

Funding the frontlines is another critical component to ending homelessness. Those experiencing homelessness and those serving this population are doing incredibly hard work and deserve the dignity and respect of a living wage. The \$13.34m request reflects the 35% increase in wage expenses and inflation providers have experienced since 2016. Our teams of professionals have worked tirelessly to provide services that have gone underfunded for far too long. These are the employees who did not stop coming into work during the pandemic, serving some of our most vulnerable, and putting their lives and families at risk in the service of others. Day in and day out, they are connecting with clients, developing trust, providing education, and doing the substantial work of getting people housed. They deserve better. We have seen with high turnover rates and uncompetitive wages that we lose high quality staff regularly. We can do better by truly valuing this work and funding our frontlines. **Please make these budget adjustments outlined above to support this work.**

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions as we look to shape Connecticut's future beyond the pandemic— it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy, cared for, and stably housed.

Sincerely,
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